



STATEMENT BY TURKEY
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Freedom of Movement and Human Contacts
Session I, 25 April 2013

Thank you Mr. Moderator.

I would like to begin by thanking the Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office for choosing such an important topic for our first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting of the year, as well as the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for its accustomed efficiency and professionalism in organizing the Meeting.

The importance of the commitments in the area of freedom of movement cannot be overstated. Their impact on historical changes in our region is still remembered as it is commonly agreed that they played a role in the collapse of many walls in Europe. Therefore we agree that it could be useful to see to which extend these commitments can be updated today.

I just mentioned the tearing down of walls in Europe but we have to recognize that new walls exist today. Restrictive visa regimes, mentioned by a number of delegations in this session, lead to situations that are labelled by some as “fortress Europe”.

The vision which is being implemented by Turkey today is based on the assumption that visa liberalization is yet another useful way to draw countries closer to each other. It is one component of our comprehensive approach towards many countries including those in our neighboring regions, which aims to achieve areas of peace and stability, free of conflicts hindering democratic development. With this understanding, Turkey has secured visa regimes, in which ordinary passport holders from nearly two-thirds of the OSCE participating States, including more than half the European Union members, are exempted from visa for their travels to Turkey.

We can already see the benefit of our policies on increased human contacts, cultural, family or touristic visits.

One word also on Turkey-EU visa regulations: full visa exemption to our citizens entering the EU countries remains an expectation from our side. Turkey wishes the process of negotiations with the EU Commission on visa exemption to be completed as quickly as possible.

I would like to take this opportunity to inform you on a recent practice that can be labelled as a good practice in the OSCE area. Our visa regime allows the citizens of many countries who are subject to visa requirements to receive “sticker” or “stamp-type” visas at Turkish border gates. Our statistics show that one-third of the nearly thirty million foreigners who visit Turkey yearly enter the country with such visas.

Very recently we have also begun issuing electronic visas to foreign citizens who are eligible to receive visas at border gates. These e-visas, which are valid for tourism or trade purposes and whose application form is very easy to complete electronically, allow visitors to our country to save the time they would otherwise spend on visa procedures. In fact, the citizens of nearly a third of the OSCE participating States, including almost half of the EU member countries, are eligible to apply for these e-visas. We believe our e-visa procedure provides a good example of using new technologies to simplify and expedite the processing of visa applications.

Thank you.